Wilson

Property Species

Mine, Yours, and the Human Mind



What is property, and why does our species have it? In The Property Species, Bart J. Wilson explores how humans acquire, perceive, and know the custom of property, and why this might be relevant to understanding how property works in the twenty-first century. Arguing that neither the sciences nor the humanities synthesizes a full account of property, the book offers a cross-disciplinary compromise that is sure to be controversial: Property is a universal and uniquely human custom. Integrating cognitive linguistics with philosophy of property and a fresh look at property disputes in the common law, the book makes the case that symbolic-thinking humans locate the meaning of property within a thing. That is, all human beings and only human beings have property in things, and at its core, property rests on custom, not rights. Such an alternative to conventional thinking contends that the origins of property lie not in food, mates, territory, or land, but in the very human act of creating, with symbolic thought, something new that did not previously exist. Written by an economist who marvels at the natural history of humankind, the book is essential reading for experts and any reader who has wondered why people claim things as "Mine!", and what that means for our humanity.

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